



Posted on Wed, Jul. 08, 2009

## Working to preserve, enhance water resources

On June 30, Gov. Charlie Crist signed into law Senate bill 2080, relating to water resources. Although the bill is not perfect, it provides many benefits to the environment and people of Florida.

The new law requires the governing boards of the state's five water-management districts to delegate authority to approve permits to their executive directors, but each of the water-management districts have been -- and will continue to be -- committed to open government and transparency.

Nothing in Senate bill 2080 diminishes, alters or limits the ability of the public from inquiring or obtaining information about a permit application or objecting to an application.

While much attention has focused on this permitting delegation, many other aspects of the bill offer greater protection for Florida's water resources that have gone largely unnoticed. These changes will help ensure the protection and conservation of Florida's water resources. They include:

- Revisions to Florida law regarding environmentally friendly landscaping. The use of Florida-friendly landscaping and other measures by homeowners is an effort to conserve water resources.
- Expansion of lands eligible to receive compensation to local governments. This provision puts into law a commitment of the South Florida Water Management District to ensure that smaller Glades communities are not adversely affected by the U.S. Sugar land acquisition.
- Streamlining government and saving taxpayer dollars; allowing meetings to be conducted via technology and authorizing the use of certain long-term permits.
- Providing fiscally sound policies that ensure the water-management districts do not overextend their financial commitments.

Every drop of water makes a difference to Florida's future, and we must continue to protect and wisely manage our water resources. There is no doubt that Florida's environment is better protected when all stakeholders are involved in the decision-making process.

As a result, I am committed to preserving the public process throughout this next year. I will continue working with the executive directors of the state's five water-management districts to ensure openness and transparency.

In addition, I look forward to working with the 2010 Legislature to develop a process that sustains transparency and stakeholder participation.

**MICHAEL W. SOLE**, secretary, Department of Environmental Protection, Tallahassee